Alberta Day Care Reforms

A fairer, better system for Albertans

Day Care Programs

Alberta Family and Social Services
July 1990

Printed on Recycled Paper

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Message From The Minister

The Government of Alberta is committed to providing programs, services, and legislation which help strengthen the families of our province, and the day care system is an important component of the government's efforts.

As part of this ongoing commitment the Government of Alberta introduced a White Paper entitled "Meeting the need...a fairer, better system for Albertans". At the time of the release of the White Paper, I invited dialogue and public participation in the final development of the reforms.

On the basis of this input, the reforms proposed in the White Paper have been adjusted. These reforms reflect the voices of thousands of Albertans committed to ensuring quality day care programs for the children of Alberta. At the same time, the reforms direct government day care funding to where it is most needed – to assist lower income families secure quality care for their children while parents work or attend training programs.

In closing, let me remind and assure you that the impact of these reforms will be carefully monitored throughout the implementation process, particularly in the case of smaller and rural day care centres, and middle income families. The quality of day care available to Alberta's children must be protected, and monitoring will be essential to ensure the continued high quality of the Alberta day care system.

Sincerely,

John A. Oldring
Minister
Alberta Family and Social Services

Meeting The Need...

Introduction

In March of 1990, the Government of Alberta introduced a White Paper entitled "Meeting the need... a fairer, better system for Albertans". For the first time since 1980, Alberta's Day Care Program was about to be reformed significantly, and the introduction of a White Paper ensured that Albertans had an opportunity to impact the reforms.

Albertans responded to the call for public input with more than 2,400 letters and phone calls. Through meetings and forums held throughout the province, another 5,000 people met directly with Day Care Program planners, including the Minister of Family and Social Services, to share their views.

In every meeting, and in every phone call and letter, Albertans expressed the value they place on quality care for children. The White Paper became more than an invitation to address specific regulatory concerns; it began a province-wide examination of the role of day care in our society.

Parents, day care operators and staff, day care advocates, and the general public all contributed to this process. And, based on their input, reforms have been developed which reflect the views and concerns of thousands of Albertans.

The development and provision of day care programs is a continuing process. It will not stop with the reforms presented in this document, but we have clearly marked a step along the path toward ensuring a high quality day care system which continues to be responsive to the changing needs of Alberta's families.

Synopsis

This paper presents reforms to the current structure of government funding of day care in Alberta, and to regulated standards governing the licensing of Alberta's day care centres. These reforms are based on public input received in response to reforms proposed in the White Paper, "Meeting the need... a fairer, better system for Albertans".

The reforms include the following:

- Over an extended implementation period, the majority of Operating Allowance funds are re-allocated to an expanded Child Care Subsidy Program and paid to day care operators on behalf of eligible parents. This begins November 1, 1990, and concludes July 1, 1994. At the completion of funding reform implementation, families with incomes of up to $48,000 may be eligible for Child Care Subsidy, depending on family size, income, and age of children in care.

- The four year freeze on new Operating Allowance Program funded spaces is lifted as of November 1, 1990.

- Qualification requirements for day care centre staff increase over an extended implementation period. This commences November 1, 1990, and concludes September 1, 1995. There are some "grandfathering" provisions for recognizing experienced directors.

- There is a change in the current structure of staff:child ratios in day care centres. The staff:child ratio for infants aged 0-12 months remains at 1 staff to 3 infants, however new age groupings and ratios are introduced.

- A new category of licensing regulations is introduced for drop-in care centres. Reduced requirements for this type of casual care will offset potential parent fee increases caused by reductions in Operating Allowance.

These reforms are a continuation of the government's commitment to providing and refining day care programs which are responsive to the needs of Alberta's parents, and which promote high quality day care options for families.

Currently, Alberta's parents have the lowest average day care costs in the country. Government funding of this important family support service will not decrease through these reforms. Instead, funds will be re-directed to increase help to those parents who need it most, and staff qualification reforms will ensure a higher quality of care for all day care centre users.

Care and Responsibility

It is important that we constantly re-examine our day care delivery systems to ensure that they are meeting the changing needs of our population. At the same time, we must not lose sight of the basic responsibilities involved in providing care for Alberta's young children.

The structuring of Alberta's day care system, and the philosophy behind the proposed reforms, are based on certain beliefs about responsibilities for child care in this province. These are the basic principles which guide the development of government day care policies and the delivery of services to Alberta's preschool children.

The Role of Parents

Parents bear the primary responsibility for the safety and well-being of their children.

They are responsible for choosing the type of care that best suits their child, and for the primary monitoring of the quality of care their child receives.

Parents are also responsible for shouldering a portion of their child's day care costs; the size of that portion increasing in relation to family income level.

The Role of Day Care Providers

It is the responsibility of day care providers to ensure that the developmental needs of children are effectively met, and that the physical environment in which care is provided is safe.

It is the responsibility of day care providers to advise parents of children in their care of any health or development concerns regarding the child.

And, it is the responsibility of day care providers to ensure all government regulated standards which apply to their day care service are strictly maintained.

The Role Of Government

It is the role of government to support parents in their endeavours to select appropriate day care for their children. Government support in this area includes encouraging safe, regulated, day care alternatives and ensuring that day care information is available to parents.

It is the responsibility of government to establish and provide enforcement of day care licensing laws and regulated standards of care which address the physical and developmental needs of children.

It is the role of government to provide financial assistance through subsidization of day care costs to lower income parents who need this assistance to maintain or enhance their families' economic integrity.

And, it is the responsibility of government to provide careful management of taxpayers' dollars in all program areas, including day care, so that funds allocated to social programs benefit those who most need society's support.

Partnership

The roles to be played by parents, day care providers and government are all important to the delivery of safe, quality service to our preschool children. Through awareness, cooperation and dialogue, Albertans can forge a more effective and efficient partnership based on doing what is right for our children and our families. The new reforms, based on these responsibilities, seek to encourage the development of a better – and fairer – day care system for Albertans.

The Alberta Day Care Reforms

In order to promote increased participation in the economic life of the province by families with children, we must ensure high quality day care options. In order to provide effective management of public funds, we must ensure that social program funding focuses on meeting the needs of lower income families in our province.

The reforms are aimed at meeting both objectives.

The reforms were developed in response to the changing needs of Albertans, and the changing social and economic environment of Alberta over the last decade. They are the result of an extensive process of development which included a three month period of public input and participation.

The result is a series of reforms which enhance Alberta's high quality of day care through more comprehensive licensing requirements, and which commit more government day care funding to the benefit of lower income families.

Funding Reforms

Operating Allowance Program

The New Policy

The majority of Operating Allowance funding, which subsidizes all children regardless of family income, will be re-directed to the Child Care Subsidy Program which subsidizes lower income families. This commences November 1, 1990, with subsequent adjustments introduced July 1, 1991 through to July 1, 1994, until a flat monthly rate of $50 per enrolled child remains. In addition, the freeze on new Operating Allowance spaces, which has been in effect since 1986, is lifted as of November 1, 1990. These new spaces will be funded at the monthly rate of $50 per enrolled child.

Why?

One of the Government's social policy objectives is to ensure that program priorities respond to the greatest needs. Previously, about 30 percent of government expenditures in day care centres benefited non-income tested families through the Operating Allowance Program. With the reform, a majority of funding from the Operating Allowance Program will be transferred to the income-tested† Child Care Subsidy Program, thus benefiting a greater number of lower income Albertan families.

The four-year implementation period provides for more gradual funding adjustments each year, thus reducing annual cost increases for parents using day care centres.

What Will Change?

Each year of the implementation period will see a decrease in Operating Allowance paid to day care centre operators. This payment schedule is outlined below:

Monthly Operating Allowance Rate Per Enrolled Child

Child's Age	Previous	Nov 1/90	July 1/91	July 1/92	July 1/93	July 1/94
0 - 12 mo	$257	$257	$200	$150	$100	$50
13 - 18 mo	257	190*	160	110	80	50
19 - 35 mo	131	110*	110	100	70	50
3 - 4.5 yr	78	78	78	78	60	50
+4.5 yr	65	65	65	65	55	50

*Reduction based on adjusted staff:child ratios

Source: Alberta Family and Social Services

The number of age categories has been increased, to reflect changes in required staff:child ratios for the new age categories.

† Income tested means that gross annual income is used as a basis, along with allowable deductions, in determining eligibility and amount of subsidy.

During the implementation period, Operating Allowance rates for all age groups will be reduced, until an Operating Allowance of $50 for each enrolled child remains in 1994. Operators will, most likely, increase parents' fees in order to offset this revenue loss. Fee increases will be offset for lower income parents through an expanded Child Care Subsidy Program. Higher income parents will pay an increased proportion of the actual costs of their child's day care.

The 1986 freeze on Operating Allowance funding for new day care centre spaces is lifted as of November 1, 1990. Operators of new or existing centres, who have not been exempted prior to November 1, 1990, will be eligible for funding of new spaces at the rate of $50 per month per enrolled child.

To attempt to obtain an exemption for a new centre, operators must submit an application for licensing and a program proposal in the appropriate form by October 1, 1990; demonstrate a substantial material commitment by November 1, 1990; be approved for an exemption; and, commence centre operation by September 1, 1991. Contact regional day care services offices of Alberta Family and Social Services for more information.

Child Care Subsidy Program

The New Policy

All funding re-directed from the Operating Allowance Program will be allocated directly to the Child Care Subsidy Program. This commences November 1, 1990, with subsequent increases July 1, 1991 to 1994. In the same time period, the subsidy schedule will be modified to ensure that more families are eligible for subsidy, and that the income levels at which full subsidy changes to partial subsidy are increased.

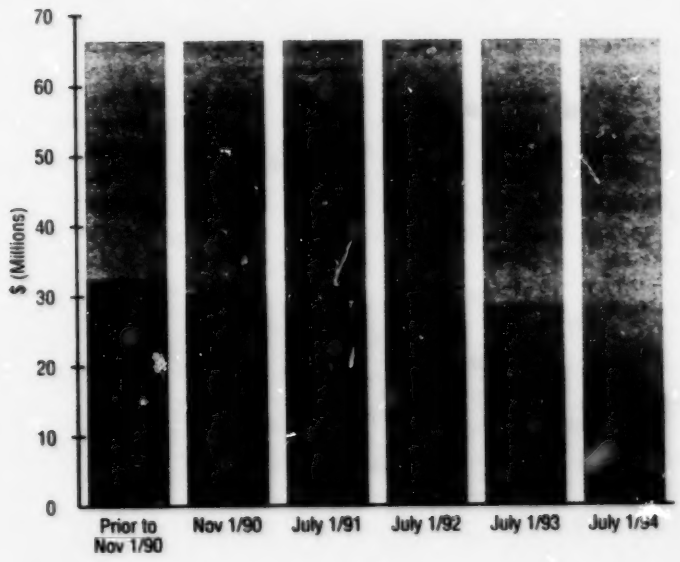
Why?

An expanded Child Care Subsidy Program will ensure that more lower income Albertan families will be eligible for subsidization of day care costs.

What Will Change?

Total funds allocated to the Child Care Subsidy Program will increase by about 50 percent over the implementation period. The funds are re-allocated directly from the Operating Allowance Program to the Child Care Subsidy Program.

Projected Proportion of Funding Allocated to the Child Care Subsidy and Operating Allowance over Implementation Period



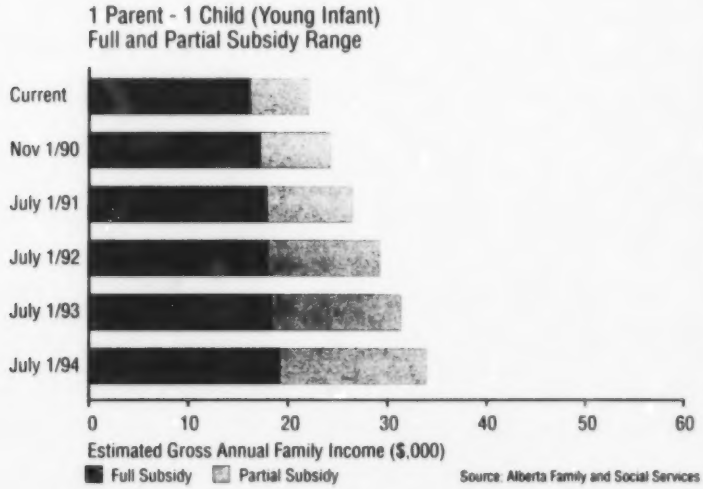
Source: Alberta Family and Social Services

Beginning November 1, 1990, and continuing through the four-year implementation period, the maximum income levels at which families become eligible for subsidy will increase. This means that:

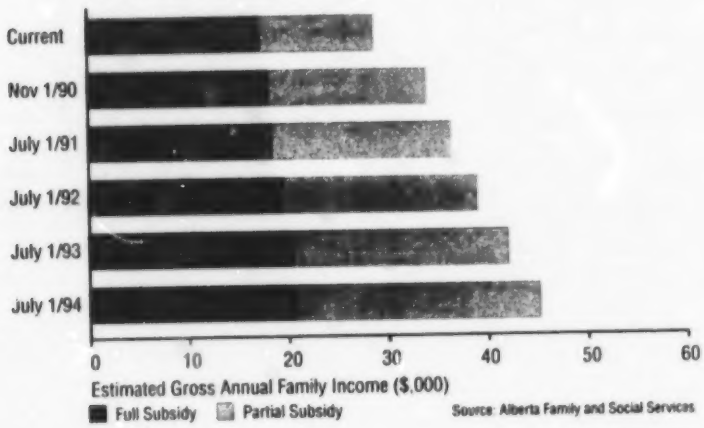
- More income-tested families will become eligible for full and partial subsidies;
- The Child Care Subsidy Program will accommodate approximately 5,000 additional children by 1994/95; and
- As the income level of an eligible family increases in the future, subsidy levels will decrease in a more gradual manner than under the previous system.

At the conclusion of the implementation period, families with earnings of up to $48,000 may be eligible for a partial subsidy, depending on family size, income and age of children in care. In addition, the maximum subsidy rate per child will increase throughout the implementation period in an amount equivalent to the reduction of the Operating Allowance.

This will ensure that day care fee increases may be offset for eligible lower income families who qualify for maximum subsidy.

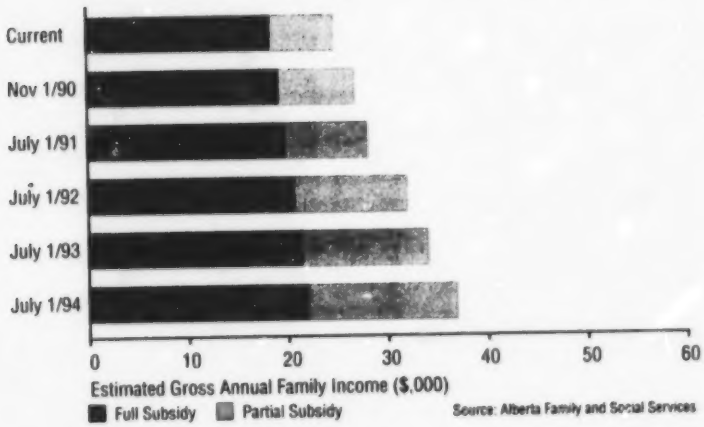


1 Parent - 2 Children (Young Infant & Toddler)
Full and Partial Subsidy Range



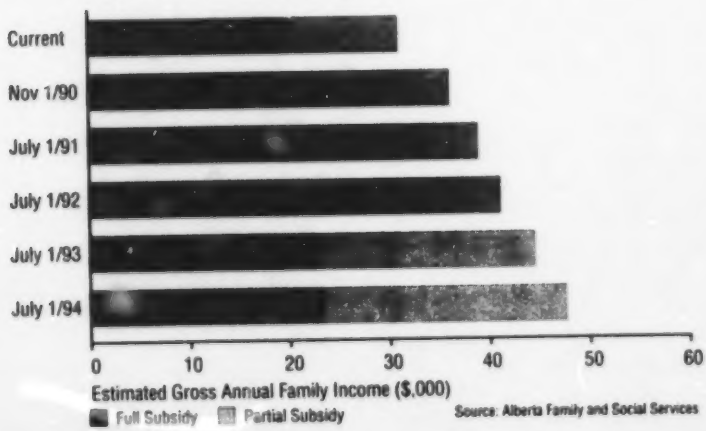
Source: Alberta Family and Social Services

2 Parent - 1 Child (Young Infant)
Full and Partial Subsidy Range



Source: Alberta Family and Social Services

2 Parent - 2 Children (Young Infant & Toddler)
Full and Partial Subsidy Range



Source: Alberta Family and Social Services

Licensing Reforms

Day Care Centre Staff Training Qualifications

The New Policy

Day care centre staff training requirements will be introduced for all staff levels and phased in over a period of five years for existing licensed centres in Alberta. This commences November 1, 1990, and concludes September 1, 1995. The new training requirements will be placed in the Day Care Regulation and are a condition of obtaining/retaining a day care centre operating license. These reforms only apply to day care centre staff who work directly with children.

Day Care Centre Directors: By September 1, 1995, all day care centre directors will have training in early childhood development or early childhood education which is at least equivalent to a two-year diploma offered by Alberta's community colleges. Current directors may qualify for certification which recognizes experience equivalency.

Directors who have a one-year certificate in early childhood education and five years experience as of November 1, 1990, receive certification as meeting the full training standard.

Directors who do not have a one-year certificate in early childhood education, but have five years experience as of November 1, 1990, are required to obtain a one-year certificate by September 1, 1993, and will then receive certification as meeting the full training standard.

Directors who have neither a one-year certificate in early childhood education nor five years experience as of November 1, 1990, are required to obtain a one-year certificate by September 1, 1993, and a two-year diploma by September 1, 1995.

New centres licensed after November 1, 1990, are required to employ certified directors.

Day Care Centre Workers: Effective September 1, 1992, one in six day care workers in each centre will be required to have training in early childhood development or early childhood education which is at least equivalent to a one-year certificate offered by Alberta's community colleges. Effective September 1, 1994, that ratio will increase to one in five day care workers. Effective September 1, 1995, that ratio will further increase to one in four day care workers. After November 1, 1990, new day care centres are required to meet the one in four ratio to be eligible for licensing.

All day care centre workers, excluding those who have met the minimum standard of a one year early childhood education certificate equivalency, will be required to have taken a mandatory 50 hour Orientation Course or provide evidence of equivalent course work. The Orientation Course will be offered on both a credit and non-credit basis through contracts with organizations and through community colleges.

Assessment of credentials and equivalencies, for both directors and staff, is conducted by Alberta Family and Social Services professional staff of the Day Care Staff Qualifications Project. Advice is obtained from an advisory committee of community college coordinators for credentials which are more complex.

Why?

Research shows that the presence and involvement of trained day care staff is one of the essential components of quality day care for preschool children. Consistent with the government's commitment to ensuring quality day care for Albertans, the proposed reforms seek to increase the level of training of all day care centre staff.

Day care centre directors play an important role in providing professional leadership in the provision of care to children. In recognition of this, a minimum requirement of a two year college level diploma equivalency is considered both reasonable and appropriate. And, in recognition of the value and importance of experience, work experience is considered in the certification of current day care centre directors.

Increasing the ratio of trained day care centre workers to one in four in each centre by September 1, 1995, ensures a better trained staff to complement the efforts and direction of day care centre directors. The impact of this ratio will be monitored and reviewed over time, and may be changed in the future.

Providing all remaining day care centre workers with a 50 hour Orientation Course ensures that untrained staff have specific awareness and sensitivity to issues surrounding the provision of child care in a day care centre environment.

What Will Change?

In order to accommodate the increased need for formal education programs, Alberta's community colleges will expand the capacity of their certificate and diploma programs in early childhood education. Particular attention will be given to promoting access to these programs for students in rural and remote areas, and to ensuring that the needs of day care centre staff are considered when planning the delivery of these courses.

In order for a new day care centre to qualify for the phase-in of training standards, operators must submit an application for licensing and a program proposal in the appropriate form by October 1, 1990; demonstrate a substantial material commitment by November 1, 1990; be approved for an exemption; and, commence centre operation by September 1, 1991. Contact regional day care services offices of Alberta Family and Social Services for more information.

A formal review of the implementation of all day care centre staff training standards will occur at the end of the five year phase-in period.

Staff:Child Ratios

The New Policy

Minimum day care centre staff:child ratios are as follows:

Previous Age Groups	Previous ratios	New Age Groups	Ratios as of Nov 1/90
0 - 18 months	1:3	0 - 12 months	1:3
19 - 35 months	1:5	13 - 18 months	1:4
3 - 4 years	1:8	19 - 35 months	1:6
5+ years	1:10	3 - 4.5 years	1:8
		4.5+ years	1:10

Why?

The Alberta Government is commited to ensuring quality care for Alberta's children. Child:staff ratios, staff training requirements and maximum group sizes are the three main factors affecting quality of day care. These three components must be carefully balanced in order to maintain the high quality of day care Albertans enjoy.

In establishing reform to the minimum staff:child ratio, and concurrent reforms to staff training requirements, this balance was carefully considered.

What Will Change?

The staff:child ratio is a minimum standard that a parent can expect in a day care centre. Day care centre operators may offer staff:child ratios which are higher than the legislated standard, and parents have the right to choose day care centre options which exceed this requirement.

The new staff:child ratios may, however, assist day care operators and parents in adjusting to Operating Allowance Program reforms. The Operating Allowance Program and Child Care Subsidy Program schedules are both adjusted to reflect the new age groupings and staff:child ratios.

Drop-in Centres

The New Policy

Effective November 1, 1990, the Day Care Regulation is amended to include a new definition of service for drop-in centres, and to introduce staff:child ratio licensing requirements for drop-in centres.

Drop-in centre operators may choose one of two options for licensing their service under the new requirements.

An operator may choose to have the service licensed as a drop-in centre, with required staff:child ratios as follows:

Age	Staff:child Ratio
0 - 18 months	1:5
19 - 35 months	1:8
3 - 4 years	1:12
+5 years	1:15

If operators choose this option, they are not eligible for Operating Allowance and cannot enroll a child for more than 40 hours per month.

Drop-in centre operators have a second option to continue receiving Operating Allowance if the centre is licensed under the day care centre standards requirements, including the higher staff:child ratios.

A day care centre operator may choose to offer both drop-in and regular day care services, with two licenses for different areas of the facility. Operating Allowance is only paid on behalf of children enrolled in the part of the facility licensed as a day care centre.

Why?

The Operating Allowance Program currently subsidizes drop-in centre spaces, but drop-in centre services do not meet the 50 hour minimum attendance requirement of the Child Care Subsidy Program. As reforms to the Operating Allowance Program are implemented, drop-in centres will be affected by a loss of revenue which is not offset by the Child Care Subsidy Program.

The ratios will ensure that there is a greater flexibility in licensing requirements which recognizes the unique service of drop-in centres.

Programming which meets the on-going developmental needs of children is essential in regular day care centres, but is neither needed nor practical in drop-in centres.

What Will Change?

The reforms recognize the important role of drop-in care, and provide greater flexibility in licensing regulations for drop-in centre services.

Lower ratios and adjusted programming standards, reflecting the brief amount of time children spend in a drop-in centre, will allow drop-in centre operators to lower their operating costs in the face of decreased Operating Allowance revenue.

Parents will have access to another licensed child care service option.

Making It Happen...

Day care is a family issue. Day care provides parents, particularly women, with the opportunity to enhance the economic strength of their families. And, it provides more families with the opportunity to contribute to, and participate in, the economic life of our province.

Increased day care opportunities for lower income parents enables more families to become stronger. And, staff training requirements improve the quality of day care available to all Albertan families.

But, for these reforms to work, there must be a strong and continuing partnership between parents and government to ensure that the quality of care is maintained. Monitoring of day care services must be a shared responsibility if we are to guarantee good care for Alberta's children.

For its part, the government will ensure that day care centres are monitored for compliance to the new standards. In the past, Operating Allowance funds to centres were tied to maintenance of staff:child ratios. In the future, the Operating Allowance will only be available to centres maintaining all legislated standards. All day care centres will be closely monitored for compliance, but there is a limit to how much government can – and should – do.

Parents play an important role in ensuring good quality care for their child. Government monitoring systems are good, but parents visit their day care centre at least twice each day. Parents are in the best position to evaluate the ongoing care their child is receiving. Parents also have an essential right to question, challenge, and follow-up on any concerns they may have regarding their child's care.

Parents are responsible for ensuring that the care their children receive is appropriate and meets their child's needs. To help parents do this, specific information is available at Alberta Family and Social Services regional licensing offices. This information will assist parents in evaluating the quality of day care being offered to their child, and provides guidelines for monitoring the care their child receives.

Together, parents and government will ensure that high standards of quality day care are maintained. Any time there is a problem identified, either by government or parents, there will be action taken to ensure that quality of care is not compromised.

Planning For The Future

The Alberta Day Care reforms are preventative, pro-active measures which will benefit our province, both economically and socially.

The reforms will improve the quality of care that all children in the regulated day care system receive, and will use Alberta's tax dollars where they are needed most in the day care system — to assist lower income parents provide care for their children, so that future generations of Albertans can establish and maintain economic strength.

The reforms reflect the input of thousands of Albertans who expressed their views, support and concerns about day care in the province. In particular, the implementation period has been extended in direct response to the need to ensure that adjustments, for both parents and operators, are more gradual.

Throughout the implementation period, the government will carefully monitor any impact on groups and organizations which may be sensitive to the changes. This includes middle-income earners who use day care, smaller and rural day care centres, and employer sponsored worksite day care. Whenever a problem is identified, it will be acted on.

As the needs of Alberta's families change over time, so too must the provision of day care services to meet their needs. The reforms presented in this paper, the careful monitoring of their impact, and adjustments when required, are all integral parts of that on-going and essential process.

For these reforms to be successful, they cannot be viewed as a final solution to day care issues in Alberta. We must continually be examining ways to make our programs better, and our services more responsive to the needs of all Albertans.

Meeting the need... with a fairer, better system for Albertans.

For additional copies of this document, or the detailed Funding Highlights and Licensing Highlights available July 27, 1990, contact your local MLA constituency office or call, toll free, 1-800-661-9691.